[We are sorry that only 6 articles, that were published in the Bulletins, are available.]

First International Conference of the Simplified Spelling Society.

Aug. 26 to Sept. 1, 1975, at College of All Saints, London, N.17, England.

[Spelling Reform (Anthology) ed Newell Tune a2.13 p39 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Summer 1976 p5 in the printed version]

Proceedings

The papers presented at the 1975 Conference in London will be published under the title, 'Reading and Spelling,' *Proceedings of the 1975 Conference*. This limited edition will contain nearly 200 pages and will cost £4.00 ($10.00 USA) post-paid.

The contents will be as follows:

Hieroglyphs of Ancient Egypt, by David Seton
Writing in Japanese, by Prof. F. J. Daniels
Ancient & Modern African Syllabaries, by Geo. O'Halloran
Sounds & Symbols in Spanish, by A. R. G. Burrows
Problems of Spelling in German by Rolf Landolt
The History of English Spelling, by Dr. D. Scragg
Speed-Writing Shorthand, by Bryan Edwards
Possibilities of a Useful Pasigraphy, by Prof. T. Hofmann
Visual Methods in Teaching Reading, by George O'Halloran
Phonic Methods in Teaching Reading, by Beatrix Tudor-Hart
Chomsky, the English Orthography & Reading, by Prof. John Downing
Spelling, Psychology & Colour Story Reading, by Ken Jones
Regularised English & the Teaching of Reading, by Prof. Axel Wijk
Direct Methods in Teaching Eng. as a For. Lang., by Dr. J. Osanyinbi
A Cross Cultural Study of Eng. Lang. Competence, by Dr. J. Osanyinbi
Illiteracy: Is Eng. Spelling a Factor? by Marjorie Chaplin
Sensubul English Spelling, by Hugh Jamieson of the Simplified Spelling Society
Essential Requirements for Reformed Spelling, by Dr. W. Gassner
The Spel, by Patrick Burke
Torskript, by Vic. Paulsen
A Future Orthography Balancing Sound & Sense, by D. Masson
Towards a Spelling Reform, by Prof. A. Mazurkiewicz
Spelling & Parliament, by W. Reed
Light at the End of the Tunnel, by Ed. Rondthaler
Assistance to Spelling via Pronunciation, by R. Cropper

There will be much of interest to all those interested in the English language, particularly to those who teach it either to native speakers or to foreign learners. Teachers of reading will find much to broaden their views. There are sections showing the origins of writing and how it is done in other languages nowadays so that we may learn by comparison. Modern methods of teaching reading occupy a large part of the volume, which should be useful to both lecturers and students in Teachers Colleges, as well as to teachers and parents. Some space is also devoted to spelling reform. There is also the final report on the largest experiment ever done anywhere in Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

This book has something for almost everybody. It will broaden the horizons of all connected with the teaching of reading — especially those who wish to understand more about the difficulties their learners face.

I appeal to you for any help you may be able to give by ordering the book in advance or by helping us to get more sales for it. We are anxious that our first major publication should go into teachers colleges and public libraries where it will be accessible to all.

Geo. O'Halloran, London, England.

[Spelling Progress Bulletin, Spring 1975, p18 in the printed version]

Announcement

The Simplified Spelling Society was founded in 1908. In spite of its age, this is the Society's first ever conference and so we are taking the utmost care to ensure its success in every way.

The College of All Saints is situated in its own carefully tended grounds in a quiet corner of North London. The accomodations for Conference members is in new buildings built to harmonize with the older buildings.

The College is within three minutes walk of White Hart Lane railway station from where frequent trains carry passengers into the very heart of London in only 18 minutes. It is also close to London's underground and to numerous and frequent bus services connecting up to theatre land, museums, exciting shopping centres, etc.

Members of the Conference are accomodated in wellfurnished, comfortable study-bedrooms, all with hot and cold water. Towels and soap are provided. All meals, including morning coffee and afternoon tea, are provided for Conference members in the College refectory. Special diets and packed meals may be arranged with the caterer. Provision can be made for early morning tea.

We can also accomodate some 'social' members. These may be wives, children, friends, etc. of the Conference members who do not necessarily wish to attend all, or even any, of the proceedings of the Conference.

Parking is available for Conference members on the College grounds and nearby there are ample postal and telephone facilities. There are also facilities for leaving and passing on messages and mail.

The Conference meetings will be held in the lecture halls of the College. These are equipped with modern audio-visual aids. Tape recorders, film projectors, slide projectors, epidiascopes and overhead projectors are available.

The Conference Chairman is Dr. John Downing. Prof. Downing was formerly Director of the Reading Research Unit of the Univ. of London and is currently Professor of Education at Victoria Univ., British Columbia, Canada. He is also President of the Simplified Spelling Society. Prof. Downing will be reading a paper dealing with the implications of recent research, including his own, into the teaching of reading.

A programme is planned into many aspects of reading, learning reading, and teaching reading. Use hope to include studies of our alphabet, its shapes, functions, origins; spelling and its implications for the beginner and later. There will be sections for modified and adapted alphabets and their influence on the speed and ease of learning to read. There will be a few papers on reading in languages other than English and also in non-Romanic orthographies. We are planning a programme which will widen horizons and also be of practical use and benefit to teachers, college lecturers, educationists, phoneticians, orthographers, and intelligent lay-folk — perhaps even parents.

We hope that prospective Conference members, in any of the categories described above, will write us soon if they wish to present a paper. Details from the Conference Secretary. It is hoped to publish the proceedings of the Conference.

There will be an exhibition at which orthographers and others who are unable to attend may, for a small fee, exhibit new work on orthography. Details from the Secretary.

The period of the Conference will extend from Tuesday evening 26th August (dinner will be provided) until Sunday morning 1st September.

Conference Fees.

With full meals and residence		
For the full five night period:	£30.00	($75.00)
Per day for shorter periods:	£6.50	($16.00)
Non-resident but including meals		
For the full period	£10.00	($25.00)
Per day for shorter periods:	£2.50	($6.00)
Non-resident, no meals		
For the full period	£6.00	($15.00)
Per day for shorter periods:	£1.50	($4.00)

These charges also include free membership of the Simplified Spelling Society until January, 1976.

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The Reading & Spelling Symposium

To be publisht soon by the British Simplified Spelling Society by foto-offset reproduction, ca. 200 pages, same size as this page. price £4.00 ($10.00), post-paid. Orders: Publications Sec., London, Eng.

This book is the first major publication in recent years of the Simplified Spelling Society. It is made up of a set of 28 papers presented at the First International Conference on Reading and Spelling of the Society in 1975.

It is truly international in scope. Papers were contributed from Britain, U.S.A., Canada, Australia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Africa: Nigeria and The Gambia. All of the contributors considered as experts in their own fields — many of them are already acknowledged internationally as such.

One important piece of new research — the teaching of English as a Foreign Language trials in The Gambia — is described by one of the investigators, Dr. John Osanyinbi, Research Controller of the prestigious West African Examinations Council.

The remaining papers form an interesting miscellany on written communication through time and space. There is an informative account of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics from David Seton and also an interesting proposal for extending the use of hieroglyphics in the modern world by Prof. T. Hofmann. Other nations' problems in representing their speech in writing are described by Prof. Daniels (Japanese), A. R. G. Burrows (Spanish) and Rolf Landolt (German). These allow us to see by comparison how relatively unlucky English speakers are. And, of course, there are the remedies — the reformed alphabets put forward by experimental orthographers.

There are also some valuable items by teachers who have had to take more orthodox roads out of the English spelling problem by adapting their teaching methods to the language as it stands.

There are in addition several thought provoking items on various aspects of the English language and its study. This book will be of great interest to all those concerned with the language, whether as teachers or as students.

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[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1981 pp11–13 in the printed version]

The Possibilities of Change in English Orthography,

by Thomas R. Hofmann, Ph.D.*

*Shimane Univ., Matsue City, Shimane, Japan.
*Presented at the 1st Internat. Conf. of S.S.S. at All Saints College, London, Aug. 26–31, 1975.

This presentation is not primarily a proposal of some reform, although I do mention some, nor is it an argument for one in particular, or against another reform. Rather I want to stand back from specifics & ask about the whole question of orthographic reform for English. Is it possible? Under what circumstances? How? When? Even though the record of reform in English has been an almost unblemished failure, the answers to these questions do not appear to be pessimistic.

There seems always to be, from the 16th century on, many reforms proposed & many reformers ready to propose more. Because there is a ready supply of reform, especially nowadays, I will not consider specific reforms (except as examples), & turn instead to the forces for & the forces against reform.

1. For Change.
We are probably all aware of the forces for reform; we try to exploit them when we propose a reform. I see basically only 3. There are the school children who must learn, generation after generation, the antiquated & illogical standard spellings, or orthography, of English. School time could presumably be saved, & pupils would be happier (or at least less alienated) if we had a systematic orthography with fewer exceptions. Of course, it is not only the school children; some of us never learn to spell, even at advanced years. Because many adults cannot spell correctly, we have a 2nd argument.

Democracy is served better if everyone can read & write, Adults who find it difficult to read & pure pain to write simply do not participate in a democracy. To have a class of people who cannot read & write, or else do not because it is too difficult, is effectively to have rule by the other class. This is the case in the U.S.A. & perhaps also in England, but Canada & Australia do not have this problem so much. Thus a 2nd force for reform is a desire for democracy, but I would not place too much hope on this force as most people are not especially desirous of sharing their wealth & power with the presently disenfranchised class, & that class is probably not over 20% of the people, although I have heard estimates as high as 50% for the U.S.A.

A 3rd possible force is the use of English as an international means of communication. It is often argued that we must make English spelling logical, to enhance its possibilities for use as an international language. Actually, however, this force appears illusory, & may even be a force against. I see 2 types of people who use English as a 2nd language in their profession. One group consisting of businessmen, bankers, scientists, etc. use the written form of English primarily. If they can speak some too, it is an added advantage, but their interest is primarily in written language. The other group — vendors, tour guides, clerks, & the like — use spoken English & need little or no ability in written English. Changing the written form of English — reforming it so that it matches spoken English much better — would aid this 2nd group, but they probably will not gain much as they are not going to read & write in English anyhow. And the 1st group is not going to appreciate having written English changed. In fact, I would predict that they will actively resist a speling reform. Although they might be able to pronounce English better, their pronunciation is 2ndary in their use of English — to the written formulas, business letters, legal designations, etc. that they

will have to change. Thus I am afraid that the international usage of English is not a force toward change, & is probably a force against change. It is true that the teacher of English as a 2nd language will be greatly benefitted by a reformed orthography, but English teachers in other countries will have little effect on English usage, & will in any case feel obliged to teach the commonly used spelling, i.e. the traditional orthography — until the vast majority of anglophones are using a reformed spelling. So even they cannot be counted on for more than verbal support.

This completes the list of forces I know of for change — easier teaching, the ideal of better democracy, & the international usage of English, & I am afraid that this last is more of a force against than a force for change. You may know of other forces for change, & I hope that you will tell me, because there is a real need to mobilize all the forces we can find. I have not considered some arguments, like G. B. Shaw's argument of saving paper & ink, or questions of phoneticness, because a society will tolerate a tremendously inefficient writing system, so long as it serves to communicate with everyone unambiguously. Consider French, for example. Although if needs 10% more letters than English to write the same thing, that is no motivation for francophones to drop the final letters (unpronounced) or switch to English.

2. Against change.
That brings us to the forces against change: The biggest is probably the reading public. When a literate person reads, he does not read letter by letter, pronouncing each as he goes along. Rather, after grade school, he reads by recognizing the printed shapes of words. This makes him a poor proof-reader as he cannot see misspellings even when looking right at them, but it makes him a much faster reader. The trouble is, for us at least, that this mature reader does not care whether English spelling is logical or not. He does not "sound out" a word unless he comes across a new word, & even then, he recognizes the morphemes in it & combines them. But he does care, if you propose to change the shapes of words. His fast reading ability goes "down the drain" with any extensive reform, as he is (at least for a short while) forced into reading letter by letter. To the normal reading public, an orthographic change means learning to read all over again. Of course, with a well designed change, he can do this fairly rapidly. Indeed, my experience with reading material in non-standard orthographies is that after a page, one begins to read faster, & I imagine that within 20 pages, one is nearly back to a normal reading speed. But there is no way to convince someone that some proposed orthography is not hard to read, without getting him to read at least 10 pages. The 1st paragraph usually includes a lot of guess work, & is slow, to say the least, but that is where any new reader must begin & usually quits.

Moreover, the writing public is even more inconvenienced. They have got to learn how to spell all over again. And there can never be a phonetic orthography for English which will be phonemic for more than 1 or 2 dialects. [1] So the naive avoidance of new orthographies is right: learning to write means, for most writers, a lot of tedious work with a dictionary. Most writers do not like to misspell words, hence they will resist writing in any new orthography in which they will likely make many errors.

A 3rd force is the publishers, who I used to think were quite formidably entrenched with standard customs of spelling. I have found, however, that various publishers were willing to publish my work in linguistics & pasigraphies in a slightly non-standard orthography, providing that they could footnote that it was the author's desire & not the publisher's mistake. However, the cost of tooling up for some or many non-standard letters is quite expensive; something that an ordinary publisher cannot do without being sure that his investment in new letters will not be wasted.

Sufficient money could cure all these problems, but even if wisely placed, I suspect that it would require more than all the reform movement could find. There are other problem, however, that money cannot cure.

As we all know, there are some major differences in English dialects. Most proposed reforms are phonemic & represent the pronunciation rather closely. But whatever reform does this well for American English cannot do well for British or Australian English, & vice versa, not to speak of Indian English. What is liable to happen with most reforms is to split English into 2 languages, British & American, & having gone that far, Canadian & Australian will probably split off too. Now this might be good, at least for the school children, but publishing costs will go up as a book will not find as many buyers in a given orthography, & also there will not be a community of English speaking nations any longer. In fact, India might well stop using English as her lingua-franca, & the international usage of English would split up & eventually drift off to some other language(s). The result is to lower the value of being able to read & write English, perhaps way out of proportion to the lower cost of education. Wise proposals for reform are equally applicable on both sides of the Atlantic, but as the implementation of such a reform is a socio-political process, it is unlikely to be adopted on both sides of the Atlantic, & that would lead to the same result. I do not know how widely this danger is realized, & is thereby a force against reform, but I think that the trend-setters everywhere are vaguely aware of it. At least reformers should be aware of it, & do what they can to prevent 2 Englishes.

This consideration, I think, prevents any serious & thorough reform of English, but it will still allow considerable revision & regularization of spelling.

Lastly, there is some sort of irrational fear of resistance to change, whatever kind it is. Just as there is a great hesitance to metric conversion, so will there be resistance to planning any change in spelling. If conversion to metric comes off without too much antagonism, people will have learned that change is not so painful as expected. Then is the time for pushing for orthographic reform. The winds of change are in the air, & when changing, it is not too hard to "go whole hog," to change other things (like spelling) while you are at it.

Nevertheless, it should be realized that there will be extra resistance to language change. The way a man speaks is part of his identification: who he is & what community, he belongs to. To ask anyone but an actor to speak differently is to ask him to change who he is, & usually meets with much resistance. The way a person writes, the spelling he uses, is the only visible aspect of language. It reflects what nation or group of people he belongs to, & a person will seldom change that unless his whole nation is changing as well. Try writing with the spellings appropriate to the other side of the Atlantic: (-our/-or or -ise/-ize) & see if you do not feel different & receive social pressure to return to the standard usage.

Thus, I see a number of fairly strong forces against change. I assume that they are the reason that no serious change has ever succeeded for English spelling: Unless we can find a way to overcome these forces, there can be no hope for a successful reform, & therefore no reason to discus what reform would be best.

3. How?

A few comments might be in order here. No revolution political, social or orthographic — is possible when a nation is successful. When you are doing well, there is no need to change how you do it. It is even apparent wisdom to avoid change, for fear that you will change something vital to your success. "Leave well enough alone", has been a good policy of the status-quo advocates. I believe that this applies to orthographic revolution as well — that people will be willing to change only when they are weak & poor not too successful, & want to do better. The English speaking nations are not in that state in this half of the century, & they will probably never all be in that state at the ' same time. To me, this means that there are 2 strikes against any reform which uses an alphabet much different from the extended Roman alphabet. Because that is a revolution in writing,

it cannot be adopted by the various English-speaking nations at the same time, & it will change the visual shapes of words beyond recognition, creating havoc in the reading habits of literate adults.

A 2nd principle, one which was pointed out by Gelb, is that all reforms of writing have come about by official or government agencies. [2] To my knowledge, this is very close to being true. Of course, if a government adopts some reform, then many civil servants will be forced to write in it, thereby creating a body of literature in it, & most people will want to read things that affect them. Thus government documents usually find a large readership. This means, of course, that if we desire to reform English orthography, we must convince governmental agencies like the Government Printing Office in the USA or the Queen's Printer in Canada.

Because of the problems with revolutions, & the need to keep visual word shape fairly constant, I can only see small reforms having a significant chance of success. But, with a series of small reforms, we will have a major reform.

One such small reform that should antagonize only the lovers of the status-quo & orthographical etymologists [3] is to change the spelling of ch to ck when it is sounded that way. Word shape is kept roughly constant, but one of the "illogical" aspects of English spelling is removed. This would affect only a few words like arckitect, arckive, ckronic, ckromatic, sckool, arckiology, etc. This would leave ch standing only for the ch-sound, which might be attacked next. Of all the reforms I have seen proposed, this is 1 of the most innocuous. I would propose it as a test case. If we can get such a change adopted & used throughout the English speaking world, we are ready for bigger & more shocking changes. And then the reading public will be psychologically prepared for other changes. In fact, I would wager that if any logical change can be promulgated at all; there will be a ground swell of dissatisfaction with the present spelling system, many proposals for change & many more people using non-standard (& more logical) spellings.

If however, we cannot succeed at even such a minor change as this one — if we cannot get adoption of an obviously beneficial change, then it is a pure waste of effort to try to get some bigger change adopted. And in any case, we shall find where the resistance to change lies & what is needed to overcome it.

I should emphasize that I am not proposing the reform [4] mentioned above, changing ch to ck when it is sounded that way; I am sure that nearly every person here has considered it at 1 time or another. Rather to be a successful reform, it must be proposed by some significant body such as this one, What I am proposing is that we get together in this conference to see if there is not some small & beneficial change which we can agree on, & then promulgate it vigorously.

4. Another possibility

There is 1 other line of attack which can be pursued, independently or simultaneously with the above. This is my pet reform & I would like to recommend it to you because not only think it is good, but that it will alleviate some of the problems with the present orthography & most of all, will allow an easier transition to a reformed orthography.

For a number of reasons, which I will not take the time to go into here, phonetic [5] writing does not, as is commonly believed, have much if any advantage to writing with symbols such as the Japanese do. The 3 strongest advantages of phonetic: writing are: (1) teaching foreigners how to speak (2) allowing semi-literate people to write, & (3) allowing easy use of typewriters, telegraphs, dictionaries & filing systems. With modern communications technology, the last 2 are of less & less: importance. The biggest disadvantage of writing with symbols for ideas instead of symbols for sounds is the large number of symbols one would have to learn. Happily, however, linguistic science is finally discovering how to split apart ideas into component ideas.

It now seems possible to write most of the several thousand common words as combinations of 50 or so basic ideas. This is about the same number of symbols in the extended Roman alphabet, counting capital & small letters (where different), italics, numerals, etc. Like the idea of twelve can be broken down into a one & a two, which we do when we write 12, so the idea of give can be broken down into 3 ideas, or symbols.

The reason that I prefer this type of writing is that while any phonetically-based writing system can be excellent for a single dialect & perhaps adequate for a multi-dialectal language, it is necessarily restricted for use to a single language. A writing system based on ideas is of course not restricted to 1 language; it works for all languages. Such a writing system is called a pasigraphy & we already have several universally-used pasigraphies, the Arabic numerals, for example.

To be sure, I would not propose that we adopt a pasigraphy for writing English. That would violate every principle I know of. However, there are some pasigraphic symbols which are universally known: the Arabic numerals & the ampersand '&', for instance, which can be adopted into English in place of the written words. The advantages of this, besides making English more useful as an international language, is that it rids us of some irregular spellings, making our present archaic orthography more tolerable. For example, if we wrote '2' instead of 'two', we will have removed 1 objectionable spelling. Another is '&' where we commonly pronounce simply n. (Indeed, I used to think that Arthur Conan Doyle were 3 people: Arthur, Cone & Doyle.)

The biggest advantage for pasigraphic usage comes in proposing a reform of spelling. Where a reader recognizes some words in a sentence, he can often fill in the rest with only small hints as to what they are. This means that a text in a reform orthography is considerably easier to read if it has 2 or 3 recognizable words in each sentence. This logic leads, in the long term, to get people used to reading as many pasigraphs as possible in ordinary text. Then, when a major reform is proposed, they will find it considerably easier to read than if it had no familiar words. In the short term, of course, a reform, which uses the universal symbols will be more acceptable to most readers than one which does not.

5. Conclusion.

Thus, while we have a common motivation, we have suffered because of our antiquated spelling system & we desire to make it simpler for future generations — & we have a similar goal: to rid ourselves of that inappropriate orthography, I imagine that I am the only one here to suggest the use of pasigraphic elements to help overcome the problem.

What I have argued here is that there are some strong forces against any substantial revision of present orthography. These forces are strong enough to prevent anything but minor & piecemeal revision. These forces will not be easily overcome even if all the people here join forces.

Thus, it seems to me that the most important thing to do is to join forces by compromising. Even the more radical reforms can be rendered more viable if a successful push can be made to reform spelling in some small area like the ch-ck reform mentioned above. Once the English reading public realizes that they will not be hurt by reform, they will be much more willing to accept other reforms. I dare say they will even be eager to participate in further reform. The advocates of all proposed reform will benefit their own proposals by compromising to a small reform that can be pushed successfully, & by pushing it.

Success, I have argued, will require a body of writing in the reformed script, writing which people will want to or need to read. This is probably best obtained by having official government sources writing in that way. Hence, the task of reformers is to convince governments not only to allow their

written output to be in the new, but to encourage it, if not require it. Military orders & government directives, as well as government reports, will be a good place to start.

I have also suggested using as many symbols (pasigraphs) as possible, both in ordinary English & in the "reformed English." Using for example, Arabic numerals in ordinary English will accustom people to them & to the possibility of change, & will at the same time rid us of a few awkwardly spelled words. Using them in a reformed English will then make it look more familiar, & will support easier reading & spelling when one has to learn many new reading habits.

Lastly, I submit that this really radical approach might possibly succeed where less radical reforms have been unsuccessful. It has a good chance of success because it is a "creeping reform," changing only 1 thing at a time, & never leaving the writer or reader facing a strange orthography. 2nd, it may succeed in stimulating orthographic reform when enough words are written pasigraphically. After some time, people will forget how to spell traditionally the words commonly written pasigraphically (consider that many people cannot spell 2/9, & are uncertain how to pronounce, much less spell 11/21, & will be forced to spell them phonetically, or look them up in a dictionary & realize how illogical our traditional spelling system is. Moreover, once it is customary to write 'two' as '2', teachers will have a hard time to get pupils to write two or eight as they will object that it is illogical.

It seems that the time for reform is soon. The English speaking world is, or soon will be, in the process of converting to the Metric system of measurement. People will discover that they can change, & will be much more receptive to orthographic reform than they have been in the past, & I would guess, than they will be for the next 50 to 100 years.

Note 1: The notion popularized by Shaw that we could all write the way we pronounce simply would not work, as most of us know. First; there is the economics of book publishing, which cannot republish but a few books in various dialects. This means that 1 or a few major dialects will become the standard dialects for publishing, with the result that most authors will need to write in those dialects to get published. And soon enough, children will be taught them, & business & governmental reports will have to be written in these dialects to have an acceptable appearance. Second, although I can understand most different dialects at the speed they are spoken, I prefer to read 10 times faster, where I do not have time to compensate for the idiosyncracies of the author's pronunciation, & I need invariant word-shapes for my eye to pick up quickly. Writing in dialect is understandable, but only if one is willing to take the time to read slowly or to learn the special orthography.

The obvious result is to return almost to the present state of affairs. While the standard dialect(s) for publishing will be phonemic for 1 or 2 dialects (I would imagine for upper-class London & for Washington or New York), most writers & readers will be working in an orthography which is not phonemic for themselves.

1. That is, completely phonetical.
2. Gelb, I. J., A Study of Writing.
3. This change is only one of many suggestions. I dont advocate it.
4. That is, phonetical.
5. Strictly phonetical writing is for teaching proper pronunciation.

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[Spelling Reform (Anthology) ed Newell Tune at a13.8 pp191,192,196 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Winter 1975 pp11,12,16 in the printed version]

Illiteracy: Is English Spelling a Significant Factor?

by Marjorie Chaplin*

* c/o S.S.S., London, England.
* A paper presented at the First International Conference of the Simplified Spelling Society, at College of All Saints, London.

According to a pamphlet published by the British Association of Settlements in May, 1974 [1], there are at least two million 'functionally illiterate' adults in England and Wales. This term is used to describe those who can read a little, but whose attainment is so low that in practice it is more or less useless to them. This is a scandal in the Britain of today.

In my opinion, the irrationality of the English spelling system is an important factor, among a great number, contributing to the high level of reading failure and illiteracy in English-speaking countries. I am very concerned at the lack of recognition of this fact in educational circles.

Just what are the causes of reading backwardness?

Almost all educationists, social workers and others agree on a number of major causes of reading retardation.

a) Social causes: bad housing, overcrowding, lack of child care facilities where mothers are out at work;

b) educational causes: large classes in First schools, changes of school, changes of teacher, absence from school, late discovery of reading failure, and insufficient remedial help after discovery;

c) causes related to the family situation: over-mothering, leading to late development of independence, over-anxious parents or lack of parental interest, lack of time for talking in the home, leading to speech retardation; and emotional disturbance due to tensions in the home, broken families, and so on;

d) secondary to all these causes, there is a child's loss of confidence in his ability to learn to read, because he has fallen behind others of his own age, or even behind a younger brother or sister.

While there is a considerable degree of agreement that all these factors play a part in reading failure, other theories are more controversial.

Some claim that a child may have an inborn weakness as regards visual memory for shapes, or an accident of birth in the form of 'cross-laterality,' such as left-handedness but right eye dominance; some children's tendency to reverse letters or words, mirror fashion, is also widely regarded as a cause of reading retardation.

Shortcomings in the methods of teaching reading and writing in the schools of today and of the recent past are also blamed for reading failure.

Finally, the nature of our English spelling is blamed, and although at present the number of those who consider it would be worth while to reform our spelling seems to be small, there are thousands who would agree that learning to read in the English language is made much more difficult by its irregular spelling.

Experience In Teaching Retarded Readers

Having taught in an Open Air School for delicate children, and a School for Partially-sighted Boys, my last 14 years were at a Remedial Reading Centre. In consultation with the educational psychologist, the schools selected children to attend the Centre three times a week, the rest of school hours being spent in their normal school classes.

Before selection all were given Reading Age and I.Q. tests. No child with a so-called IQ of less than 80 was admitted, and in practice very few had an IQ below 90. (I say 'so-called IQ' because I am among those who have reservations as to exactly what an IQ test establishes.) Most of the time that I worked at the Remedial Centre, I was working with a colleague who, like myself, was completely convinced of the necessity of teaching by the phonic method. The children came to us in small groups of five or six, so that we were able to make considerable use of games, to give practice in recognition of digraphs, and in word-building. We agreed to pool our ideas for games and picture-clues, and gradually we developed what was virtually a systematic, programmed course in reading by phonics. We also built up a wide range of simple books to read, including the earlier books in a number of Infants reading schemes.

Children in any one group were usually of similar age and had a similar level of reading attainment. In other respects their problems might be very varied, but experience showed that, in spite of this, almost all of them made an immediate and very positive response to the learning of phonics. Over my entire period at the Centre, the number who resisted the phonic approach, or who failed to benefit by it, was so small that those particular children stand out in my mind as exceptions.

Some experts may be horrified to learn that I made no use of preliminary diagnostic tests. I did not worry as to whether a child had crossed laterality, nor whether their visual, oral or spatial abilities were the more developed. Neither was a new group, on arrival, invited to do painting or clay-modelling to acclimatise them. Such activities were left until the last 15 or 20 minutes of the session. I used to plunge straight in, and say to them, 'You are coming here so that I can help you to be good readers. I know you think reading is difficult. But I am going to teach you a very easy way. I am going to teach you the sounds of all the letters, and then teach you how to join the sounds to make words.'

I immediately set them to work matching up sets of letter cards with picture cards — a for apple, b for bat and ball, etc. Yes, indeed — 'out of the Ark,' as many would say! But it worked. Boys of 11 or 12 made no protest because this was something they deeply wanted to know about.

A few children did know the sounds of some letters on arrival; a smaller number could sound th, sh, ch. But in all my experience at the Centre, so far as I remember, not one child knew the sounds represented by vowel digraphs, apart possibly from ee.

As soon as a few letter sounds were firmly established by games, further types of games were played to give practice in 'building' words, (or blending, as it is sometimes called). The time children took to develop the knack of blending sounds into words varied greatly. This was their first, and most important, hurdle in learning to read. However many lessons had to be given in acquiring this skill, I never gave up. Once learned, this is the key to the reading of any alphabetical language in future life.

I can instance a boy and a girl aged about 9 years who, it seemed, never could learn to 'build.' I arranged to have them together for a few lessons, without the rest of the group, and one day I raced them against one another. Holding up a single short word on a card, I said, 'See who can call out this word first.' The idea of a race worked a miracle; they both discovered that they could read the words. Afterwards I realized that they both had a reason for wanting to stay at the Centre as long as possible.

What amazed both of us who were working at this Centre was the discovery that none of the children who came to us had been taught how to sound digraphs, although we had been told that teachers were using a combination of the visual and phonic approach. Then one day an incident opened our eyes to one possible cause of this contradiction.

We had a visit from two nuns from a Catholic school which had children attending the Centre. They said that these children had told them about the sounds they were learning, and they had come to learn about them. My appreciation of the professional humility of those two nuns, both fully trained teachers, will always stay with me.

What this event brought to light was that numbers of the teachers themselves did not consciously know the sounds represented by digraphs. If they had ever known this, they had forgotten about it. This would explain why so many teachers, while claiming to teach phonics, actually only drew the attention of the children to a handful of phonic aids, and left them to find out the digraphs for themselves.

To return to the retarded readers at the Centre, there was no doubt whatever about the enthusiasm of their response to this enlightening field of knowledge. For to these non-reading children, the fact that letters meant sounds and sounds could be joined together to make words was light at the end of a long tunnel — it was sight to the blind.

Children who had been apathetic towards school and books awoke to life and applied themselves to excel in the word games, and the race to learn the 'two-letter sounds.' Most of the games had an element of chance in them which prevented anyone from being regularly defeated.

Sometimes a child would voice his appreciation of our kind of teaching in a way which summed up the reactions of the majority. One small boy aged about 9 or 10 said to me, "At school the teachers just say to us, 'Go on, then, read it!' But you learns us how to read."

An older boy, in the top class of primary school, physically tall and well built, who had been so humiliated by his poor reading, said to me when he was leaving the Centre, 'You know, Miss, I still read more slowly than the other boys, but when they can't read a difficult long word, they come to me to read it for them.' What better testimonial to the phonic approach could one have?

Some Thoughts on Learning to Read

In voicing criticism of the lack of systematic teaching of reading and writing, I am nct ranging myself with the authors of the so-called Black Papers. I am enthusiastic about the general pattern of the modern approach in education as practised in the best of our state schools. But I am sure that systematic teaching of fundamental skills still has a place. It is certainly found necessary in many fields, so why not in relation to reading and writing, without which education cannot be carried out?

I would suggest that current procedures in teaching reading have taken such a hold in this country because it is almost impossible to teach an unsystematic spelling system systematically. The usual line of argument is that since efficient reading involves the recognition of thousands & thousands of words on sight, the habit of recognition of whole words should be encouraged from the start. This sounds good as a theory, but it neglects one important fact — that to memorise the patterns of 10,000 and more whole-words is tremendously difficult. It can only be achieved after a prodigious amount of reading, sufficient to encounter each of the 10,000 words 12, 15, or more times, as only repetition will ram them home for most people. Success does not simply depend on visual memory, but on having the interest, the opportunity and the time to read and read and read. For the modern child, TV and a wealth of other pursuits leave little time for reading. Thousands of children may take out library books, but there are probably many thousands more who do not.

Even more difficult than learning to read is learning to spell. Gone are the days when the bad speller was the exception among high school pupils and university students. Nowadays the good speller is a rarity. This is not due solely to modern methods of teaching reading, but rather more, probably, to the fact that today's teachers are not willing to devote precious school time to the learning of spelling lists and the giving of dictation. Since learning the idiosyncracies of the English orthography has little educational value, it does not take place, and spelling has become permissive.

The correct traditional spelling is losing its usefulness and its hold. And along with correct spelling, clear, legible handwriting seems to be on the decline also. In the days of typewriters, this may not matter so much, but I believe it would still be worth while for children to be shown how to form letters when they first begin to write. The retarded readers whom I taught also had the most rudimentary idea of how to form letters. I used to watch some of them as they wrote, and I discovered that to write a small a they might go round and round as if they were going to draw a snail, and would always draw an upright stroke first, and then add the curved stroke. In other words, they did not progress from left to right, but pure chance decided at which end of a letter they would start. Strokes were often made upwards instead of downwards. The result of teaching themselves to write was that they probably never learned to write fluently, and they lacked the kinaesthetic sensation of writing b as a sensation differing from that of writing d. Such writing confusion could help to reinforce the usual confusion among very little children over b and d.

So much for the criticism of the teaching of reading in our schools. Present methods do succeed in the vast majority of cases, and it is only those who, for one or other of the reasons I listed at the beginning, seem to suffer badly from the lack of systematic teaching.

Any criticism of our schools or out teachers must be balanced by a recognition of the enormous problems they have to cope with. The most urgent change needed is to reduce the size of classes in First Schools, so that children can receive far more individual attention in the decisive early years. Simple arithmetic can show us that even if a class is no larger than 30, and many still are, each child can only receive two minutes of the teacher's time in one hour, and only about ten minutes in the whole day. How can a teacher hear each child read daily in these circumstances, with all the other matters that have to be attended to?

Would a reform of our spelling make much difference?

If we compare the time it takes an English child to learn to read an adequate vocabulary in his own language with how long it takes an adult to learn to read a foreign language such as Italian, German, even Russian, in the sense of decoding the printed word, we can begin to realise the enormous amount of everyone's time that is wasted in the teaching and learning of English spelling.

I have indicated that retarded readers can rapidly learn to decode English words, but because our English spelling is so irregular, there can rarely be an entirely happy ending for anyone who is late in learning to read.

A boy came to our Remedial Centre at the age of about 101/2 in his last year in Primary School, unable to read a single word. The school had thought him to be unintelligent until an IQ test showed that he was of normal intelligence. He set to work with excellent application to learn phonics. Although he only attended the Centre two or three times a week, after two and a half school terms he had completely mastered the reading of any word which could be read phonetically. But he still could not remember the common, irregularly spelt words. Clearly, these would only be learnt in the course of the following years, as he met with them, over and over again, in the course of reading.

Because such a high proportion of words could not be read phonetically, a limit was set on the attainment that could be reached within ten months. On the other hand, if our spelling were reformed so that all words were spelt according to a regular system, reasonably phonetic in character, anyone, child or adult, could become completely literate, able to spell correctly as well as to read, within a few months. Compare this with the years it now takes.

When we consider the misery caused by illiteracy, and the danger of children who are failing in school taking to vandalism or petty crime, and the many other advantages of a reformed spelling, such as saving of time spent on looking up words in the dictionary in offices, apart from the educational benefits, I believe we should all begin to take this question really seriously.

[1] *A Right to Read. Action for a Literate Britain*. Pub, by The British Association of Settlements. 20p. London, England, May, 1974.

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*[Walter Gassner: see **Bulletins**.]*

The Essential Requirements for a Reformed Spelling,

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*Presented at the First International Conference of the British Simplified Spelling Society, London, Aug. 1975.

The purpose of this paper is to present, in order of importance, various aspects of spelling reform which would provide a maximum of benefits to future users and entail a minimum of inconvenience to those accustomed to the traditional spelling system. It is designed for the English language but the principles stated also hold for other languages.

(1) *Only the 26 letters of the Roman alphabet should be used* — with no augmentations and no diacritical marks which are not in use at present.

The introduction of a new system of spelling will, of necessity, impose a burden on everyone who uses the English language, no matter whether English is his native language or a language that he has acquired. To this burden, no further burden should he added, and a weighty additional burden it would be if it should become necessary to learn new letters or to acquire the habit of putting written accent signs over letters. Indeed, if it were not for these considerations, the most reasonable thing to do would be to adopt the International Phonetic Alphabet, which is widely used for teaching the pronunciation of a large number of languages and is known to scholars throughout the world. This alphabet contains, in addition to the letters of the Roman alphabet, a number of specially designed or adopted signs to provide a sign for each sound (or, to be precise, for each phoneme, a phoneme often encompassing a family of similar sounds whose exact nature in each instance is determined by its phonetic environment).

The deficiencies of the Roman alphabet can, however, also be overcome by continuing the practice of using groups of two letters — so called "compound symbols" or digraphs — for certain sounds, such as sh for the initial sound in ship, or th and ng for the initial sound and the final sound in thing. The use of compound symbols does not contradict the phonetic principle as long as these symbols are used in a consistent manner and as long as a separation mark (say, an apostrophe) is inserted where letters that usually make up a compound symbol are pronounced separately — e.g. as in mishap.

(2) *Writing should be so designed that speech can be deduced from it* — or rather, so that there can never arise any doubt regarding the pronunciation of a word.

The emphasis is on "word" — for there are limits to the things which an orthography can indicate. An orthography cannot, for example, do justice to sentence stress or allow for alternatives for certain short words usually referred to as "weak forms." Every other aspect of the pronunciation should, however, be clearly indicated, and thus it becomes necessary to have available an appropriate symbol for the Neutral Vowel (i.e., the initial sound in about) and two distinct sets of

symbols for the majority of vowel sounds, so as to make it clear which syllable is stressed and which syllables are unstressed. The last point is extremely important, for a word wrongly stressed is a word wrongly pronounced — and indeed, often misunderstood.

If this principle is applied, the difficulties of those who have to deduce the spoken form from the written form will disappear. Those who will benefit most from the implementation of this principle will be foreign learners who study from textbooks. Such persons, once they have mastered the significance of the symbols, would be in a position to read any text — even if they do not understand it — almost faultlessly, the only shortcoming being that their speech might appear slightly pedantic.

Foreign learners would of course, not be the only persons to benefit from this principle. Native English speakers, too, including highly educated ones, are at present, frequently in doubt as regards the pronunciation of a word — say, a scholarly or a technical word, or a proper name or just a word they happen to not have heard before. To clarify these cases, pronouncing dictionaries are available, and the entries in such reference works should supply the basis for the written forms under the reformed system. Obviously, once the new system is implemented, pronouncing dictionaries will no longer be needed.

(3) *Nothing should be introduced that would impair clarity by obliterating the individuality of words*. Hence, provision should be made for the distinction of homophones which are distinguished at present.

Opponents of phonetic spelling claim that clarity would suffer if homophones — words with the same pronunciation, but different meanings — were spelt alike; they might use the existence of homophones to discredit phonetic spelling and to justify the traditional system with all its inconsistencies and archaisms. Whilst their other arguments can be ascribed to prejudice, this particular argument is a sound one. For, if homophones were merged, there would be no way of distinguishing a "mail clerk" from a "male clerk", or the "fore legs" of an animal from all its "four legs." The passage in Shakespeare's Hamlet: "I scent the morning air" would have the same written form as "I sent the mourning heir"; and, as there is, indeed, a "mourning heir" in the play, such an interpretation is by no means strained.

The author of this paper has devised a system of spelling in which provision is made for the distinction of homophones wherever such a distinction is considered desirable. He cannot agree with the argument which alleges that since spoken language can afford to use like forms for words with different meanings, written language can do so likewise. The answer to that argument is: in spoken language there exist numerous ways of making the meaning of an ambiguous word clear, such as differences in intonation, pauses, gestures — all of them devices which written language lacks. Moreover, through habit we instinctively make a choice when hearing a word that allows for alternative interpretations, and this choice would usually be the right one, no matter whether we are aware of having made a choice or of the very existence of homophones. For written language, this habit of making a choice does not exist and such a habit would take a long time to develop. Even where there is no danger of an actual misunderstanding, there is still the possibility of a ludicrous effect — for instance, if "reign" were spelt the same way as "rain." On the other hand, the fact that in spoken language homophones do not create a ludicrous effect unless such an effect is intentionally brought about in a pun, demonstrates that what is tolerable in spoken language is not necessarily so in written language.

(4) *Writing should be made so that it can be deduced from speech* — subject to the limitations imposed by the alphabet and the need to distinguish homonyms.

This principle is complementary to the principle stated in the second place. The beneficiaries of it are those who know the pronunciation and are supposed to deduce the written form from the sound. They are chiefly native English speakers, schoolchildren in particular, but of course, also adults, and by no means only illiterates or semi-literates; foreigners only to the extent that they have "picked up" the language without at the same time learning how to write it.

In the minds of most people who give some thought to spelling reform, this principle should rank first. That it has fourth place, not first, is of course, due to the limitations stated above. If it were not for these limitations and for uncertainty regarding the standard pronunciation where the speaker's pronunciation is a regional variant — there would never be a need to memorize the spelling of a word. Under the author's proposed system, the spelling of some words would have to be memorized, but the proportion of such words would be small, and learning to write would no longer be the drudgery that it is today, because in every instance there will be a reasonable explanation for an exceptional written form.

It goes without saying that the exceptional written form would in no instance suggest a pronunciation other than the correct one; indeed, the device for clarifying the stress position — availability of two sets of symbols for vowels — is also the device for providing distinct forms for homophones.

(5) *Continuity with the traditional system should not needlessly be disturbed.*
The choice of symbols should, whenever compatible with the basic principles of phonetic representation, follow current English usage, not only for single letters, but also for letter groups such as sh, ee, ai, oa. This is proposed not in deference to tradition, but with the sole motive of making transition from one system to the other as easy and as smooth as possible and to allow for the probability that for a long time to come documents written under the traditional system will call for an interpretation, so that many persons will be required to have a reading knowledge of the system at present in use, which will then have become an obsolete one.

The occurence of a particular written form for one word in the new system which is identical with the written form of another word in the old system, is particularly objectionable. Whilst such a situation cannot entirely be avoided (for example, warm will have to be spelt worm), the symbols have been selected in such a way that cases of this nature have been reduced to the unavoidable minimum.

It is not an unwarranted disturbance of continuity if letters, which otherwise would be redundant, are allotted to sounds for which there is no suitable way of representation under the traditional system.

(6) *The existence of variant pronunciations*, to the extent that they are pronunciations used by educated speakers, should be taken into account.

The new system should be suitable for use throughout the entire English speaking world, despite differences in pronunciation. There a particular sound used in one speech variant is, in some other

speech variant, consistently replaced by some other sound, the key-word given will automatically be variously interpreted, but the alloted symbol will be applied in exactly the same manner by the different types of speakers. Thus, if a symbol (no matter which) is alloted to the "a as in paper," this description would appear to speakers of Southern British and many other types of English as referring to a certain diphthong (phonetically ei), whilst to Scottish speakers it would appear to refer to a certain long vowel (phonetically e:), and to some Australian speakers as referring to a different diphthong, similar to but not identical with the i in time. These Australians think they are saying long-A, and would not confuse it with the diphthong i in time.

Where sounds overlap, the system should, in principle, be based on Southern British speech (Received Standard) as recorded in pronouncing dictionaries that use the International Phonetic Alphabet, such as that of Prof. Daniel Jones, but other pronunciations should be taken into account in cases where a great many speakers make a distinction which is not made by speakers of Southern British and which is supported by the written form of the traditional spelling.

This is so with certain vowels for which cases "with r" and "without r" are being kept distinct from each other, the cases "with r" being those where the letter r-silent in Southern British speech, but pronounced in Scottish speech and phonetically significant in American speech — occurs before a consonant or at the end of a word, as in farm and farther, as contrasted with the word father, which has the same sound "without r." In Rec'd Standard, farther and father are homophones.

In situations which do not come under any of the above descriptions, alternative written forms should be permissible, as with the words now written either and clerk. The word clerk should be written klark in England and klirk in the United States. Such written variants do not constitute a threat to uniformity any more than the use of different words for the same concept, such as autumn and petrol in England and fall and gasoline in the United States.

There are also differences in pronunciation depending on the style used. Pronouncing dictionaries often give more than one pronunciation of a word. In such cases, the written form should reflect the most careful variant — assuming that though only a small proportion of speakers actually use it, most speakers would have an opportunity of hearing it. However, spoken forms that exist only in the minds of those who allow themselves to be influenced by the written form under the traditional spelling should be ruled out. This would apply chiefly to unstressed vowels.

(7) *The system should be economical* — achieving a saving of time and space.
This issue is not a fundamental one. Elimination of silent letters and of needlessly doubled letters will evidently bring about the shortening of a large number of words. The lengthening of certain other words should not detract from the overall effect, since cases in which a word is shortened occur more frequently than cases in which a word is lengthened.

(8) *The suggestion that spelling should reflect etymology is to be rejected.*
The ordinary user of words (reader or writer) is not interested in etymology and cannot be expected to be an expert on it, and the scholar has other means at his disposal. Spelling is often incorrect in indicating the true origin of words, as these who were involved, along with Dr. Samuel Johnson, in finalizing the spelling were often badly informed of the origin of some words.

However, the choice of symbols for the sounds on the principle of continuity and preference given to a "more careful" pronunciation where several variants exist might result in preserving etymology in some instances.

(9) *Some observations relating to other languages might have a certain relevancy.*
Whilst, in theory, it might appear desirable to have the same orthography for all languages, limitations of the Roman alphabet and the need to preserve continuity with traditional usage rule out any suggestion of devising reformed English spelling in such a way that letters are given particular values solely on the strength of compliance with usage in other languages or international phonetic practice. Thus, it goes without saying that the letters a and u must, in English, be alloted to sounds which are quite different from the sounds which these letters represent in most other languages. It stands to reason that similar considerations also apply to compound symbols, such as au and eu.

If thought is given to spelling reform in languages other than English, the principles applied should, broadly speaking, be the same as those applicable to English, but different approaches are needed for each language to do justice to different situations. Such diacritical marks as are used at present, e.g., the acute, grave, and circumflex accents in French and the umlaut sign in German, would continue to be used (and, of course, like everything else, in a consistent way), but no new written accent signs should be introduced. Stress presents no problem in French, but there are other factors that complicate the issue, such as the large number of instances in which up to 5 or 6 words have the same sound, and the words with consonants at the end which are normally silent, but pronounced when the next word begins with a vowel. The stress problem is satisfactorily solved in Spanish and Portuguese, but not completely in Italian; it leaves a lot to be desired in German, and still more so in Russian, where there is the additional complication that in an unstressed position, certain vowels merge and become obscured.

Spelling reforms on a minor scale have been carried out in the last few decades in a number of languages such as Russian, Polish, German, Dutch, Norwegian, Portuguese, Malay and Indonesian (both of which derive from the same stock, & have now the same system of writing). These reforms were usually designed to take into consideration the needs of native speakers, but not those of foreign learners, and were needlessly concerned with etymology. (Thus, in German, th has been replaced with t in native German words, but has been retained in foreign loan words).

For the Mandarin dialect of Chinese, now the National language of China, a romanized orthography has been devised, which has received official sanction. This orthography has not superseded the traditional ideographic notation. It is merely used as a means to teach the National Language with the correct pronunciation to speakers of other dialects and to overcome illiteracy, or rather as a first step to do so. Now, there is the fact that Chinese abounds in homophones — to a far greater extent than English or French — and by using the ideographic notation, the meaning of a word is always made clear, whilst this would not be the case if the romanized form were used. It is this aspect which explains why it must have appeared unreasonable to abolish the ideographs altogether; and since the situation with regard to homophones allows an analogy with English, these observations should strengthen the argument in favor of maintaining a distinction of homophones in English.

(10) *Some thought should be given to the idea of introducing reformed spelling gradually*. The concept of a gradual approach is championed by W. Harry Lindgren of Narrahbundah, Australia.

He proposes that the first step (termed SR-1, short for *Spelling Reform* Step 1) should encompass one single sound: the short vowel sound in "bet." This sound would invariably be rendered by the letter e — thus *frend, helth, eny, meny, sed*, etc.

Campaigning for this modest reform is supposed to create awareness of the desirability of a more logical system of spelling, without interfering to any sizeable extent with established usage. A decision on subsequent steps is left in abeyance and is not supposed to be made a subject of discussion until SR-1 is well established.

The author of this paper is not very much in favor of the gradual approach, but is prepared to concede that such an approach might be the only way to get something done. It might be feasible, first to introduce SR-1 in all English-speaking countries, and after this step has been achieved, to proceed further. To be sure, future steps will, on each occasion, have to cover a more extensive field, otherwise implementation of the ultimate reform would take a century.

A succession of steps, numbering more than, say 4, is bound to create confusion, not only because at any point of time documents would come into existence which have to be meaningful for future generations, but also because after each step dictionaries and reference works would have to be revised and reprinted. A succession of a large number of steps would cause a strain on schoolchildren, on the teaching profession and, of course, on the general public, not to speak of the confusion it would create in countries in which English is taught as a foreign language, with the result that even among those teachers and students who are in favor of phonetic spelling, many would give up in despair and revert to the system now in use, pending total implementation of the ultimate reform.

If an opinion regarding a gradual introduction of reformed spelling is required, it would appear that four steps should make up the maximum needed. The steps following SR-1 as described above would be the following:

SR-2: covering all the consonants. The letters chiefly affected are k and s (replacing c), i (replacing g), z (replacing s), and the groups *sh, hw* and *zh*.

SR-3: covering the remaining short vowels *a, i, o*, and *u*, and abolishing silent letters that serve no useful purpose. This would produce such written forms as *prity* (for *pretty*), *gluv* (for *glove*), *wosh* (for *wash*).

It stands to reason to assume that disagreement among spelling reformers on any of these points would be unlikely.

SR-4: would be the reform that produces the ultimate shape and would encompass the long vowels and diphthongs, the Neutral Vowel and a device to indicate the position of the stress. This step can evidently be taken only when agreement has been reached among spelling reformers, and it should be the task of interested persons and organizations in all English speaking countries, as well as certain instrumentalities of the United Nations Organization to prepare the ground for such an agreement.

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*[Albert Mazurkiewiez: see **Bulletins**.]*

Toward a Spelling Reform,

by Albert J. Mazurkiewiez, Ph.D.*

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*A paper presented at the First Internat. Conf. on Reading and Spelling, Aug. 1975, at College of All Saints, London.

If the reader-to-be of English, whether he/she is a child, illiterate adult, or foreign language speaker, is of concern at all, the problems inherent in the task need analysis and correction. We now recognize that if children have difficulty in telling time based on the circular 12-hour, 60-minute clock, for example, that the substitution of the digital clock eliminates the complex learnings involved in this type of telling time, and telling time is learned as the child learns to recognize and use numbers. The same process of analysis and substitution of a simpler procedure is not always the case in learning to read, though reformed orthography procedures exist and are an immediate solution to the problem.

While transition to reading the complex spellings of English is accomplished with relative ease from a reformed orthography, the child taught using a reformed orthography has some of the same problems of developing efficiency in commanding the printed page at later levels as the child taught using conventional print since teachers often fail to carry on the instruction necessary for the child to decode and internalize to the point of automaticity the remainder of the complex spellings of English. Developing efficiency in reading conventional print needs continuing attention since we cannot expect the reader to be self-motivated to puzzle out the complex grapheme-phoneme correspondences of increasingly more difficult matter. In fact, research has shown **[1]** that few young adults will even use dictionaries to determine the pronunciation of a word since the procedure is an interference in the reading act. Research also shows that if a child needs to refer constantly to other sources for aid in decoding print, he turns away from the task, just because it is a task and also because it is task which is often unrewarding.

The analysis of the learning to read activity (and reading well) indicates that the orthography as conventionally printed is a major handicap.

The work of Downing and colleagues **[2]** on the use of i.t.a. has demonstrated conclusively that traditional orthography is a significant handicap to the child's task of learning to read. Soffietti, **[3],** in his linguistic analysis of the language, demonstrated that traditional spelling was the primary cause of failure in learning to read. Makita **[4]**, in a study of the extent of reading disability among Japanese children as compared with United States populations, demonstrated that the incidence of disability was about one-half of one percent as opposed to the average of twenty-five percent found in the U.S. and convincingly demonstrated that this difference could be attributed to the spellings of English. The phonemic form of Japanese, Romanji, was then compared with Pitman's i.t.a. to indicate that this reformed orthography compared favorably to Romanji and, as such, provided the basis for an attack on the problem.

Since the initial teaching alphabet in reading and writing instruction has been shown to be one viable alternative, why then a spelling reform? Like all alphabetic innovations of the past, gross misinformation, the pressure of the market place where large corporations with their huge staffs of representatives and investments of countless millions in conventional reading materials overwhelm

the "opposition," insecure educational administrative staffs who are preservers, or believe they are to be preservers, of the status quo and make administrative or public relation rather than educational decisions, parental concern that spelling might be negatively affected, etc. have combined to limit the employment of educationally sound alternatives and only a limited usage can be expected in the future.

Certainly spelling reform is not needed for those of us who are literate. But research has demonstrated that countless millions are barely literate, that millions of others read badly or, if able, read little, and that countless thousands of young children continue to suffer failure, ego-damage and frustration. Others continue to spell badly even after 12 or more years of education.

Additional research [4] examining another aspect of the development of literacy — learning to write (spell) the language — have demonstrated that children and young adults often choose to write a word they know how to spell rather than the word that first came to mind, rarely use a dictionary to check the spelling of a word ("since I can't find it because I don't know how it's spelled."), and suffer embarrassment because their spellings don't conform to the "accepted" ones.

Even the words "accepted spellings" indicate a problem since most children and adults are unaware that off-times their spellings are equally correct alternative spellings. Instruction on these is rarely, if ever given since teachers are as unaware of these alternatives as the children they teach and, if a choice is given, the more difficult of two alternatives is taught on the assumption that it is the "preferred" and therefore the correct spelling.

But conventional spelling is also racist and the arbiter elegantiae (supreme arbiter) of social class or status. There is a marked tendency to use the spellings a person writes as a measure of his literacy or social status: good spellers are associated with the well-educated upper class, poor spellers with the poorly-educated lower class. Rewards, in terms of employment, promotion, etc. are often related similarly for as Perrin and Smith [5] point out in their Handbook on Current English:

The man who writes with no misspelled words has prevented a first suspicion of the limits of his scholarship, or in the social world, of his general education and culture.

Recent Reform

Arguments against spelling reform abound in the literature, yet, as anyone familiar with the subject knows, each of these are errored on one or more bases and nearly all may be traced to sentiment. It is also true that enough attention to the peculiarities inherent in English spelling has been demonstrated or experienced so that one sample of 230 educators, business men, and secretaries [6] showed that 88% favor some type of spelling reform while another sample of almost 800 educators confirmed this finding [7], indicating a widespread current interest.

Responses such as that of a manager indicated that "In my high school graduating class, half of the class could hardly spell the easiest words," or of a teacher who stated that "Many times when I'm writing reports, I have to consistently refer to the dictionary to check spellings," or that of another teacher "the more phonetic the spelling, the easier it would be for children to succeed in spelling and related tasks," or still another "Modern spelling reform would prove an invaluable aid to better reading success by many who now find reading and related skills an impossible barrier," are illustrations of the felt need for spelling reform.

While the reformer has not been able to have much direct effect in recent years in producing change, it is notable that no research other than that cited above exists to support a change. Many reformers and alphabeteers exist but little evidence exists that these reformers have proceeded

logically to marshall support. In spite of this lack, reform, slowly and inexorably, has taken place with little or no outcry. Changes in spelling have occurred primarily in the realm of business and industry and these have been adopted by the public at large. Yogurt, popularized as a food by television commercials in the U.S., and spelled five different ways (all of which are equally correct) has been accepted as the standard spelling. In one study [8], a sample of 910 teachers and parents only vaguely recalled that yogourt and yoghourt were alternative spellings a few short years ago and none would replace the phonemic yogurt with any of the five previously used spellings. A group of psychologists when tested on the spelling of donut questioned whether there was another way of spelling it. When shown the spelling doughnut, individuals remarked "Oh yes, but we haven't used that for years; that's obsolete."

Oddly enough, the spelling of draught, mispronounced by many to rhyme with caught, for the game of checkers (draughts) is hardly recognized as the spelling for draft beer with the switch by beer manufacturers from the antique spelling to the phonemic draft only a few years ago. The wholesale abandonment of *ue* after *g* in epilog, analog, catalog, monolog, by millions and by publishers of catalogs, producers of analog computers, makers of television dramas, etc. is resisted by a relatively few. The American brand of catsup, pronounced /ketchup/, and alternatively and equally correctly spelled catchup, catsup, or ketchup, has been formalized as *ketchup* by industry. In fact, one study [9] of product names currently underway shows that over 300 different items have been respelled to represent their pronunciations more closely (e.g., Snak-Pak), are spelled to provide instant identification with the hope for or planned purpose of the product (Fab suggests fabulous, Duz — does everything, etc.), or show the most phonetic alternative of several available (ketchup). The use of the macron in Nodōz and Nestlē to indicate the pronunciation of the glided vowel is paralleled in corporate names: Apēco.

Resistence to spelling reform, identified by Lounsbury [10] as primarily based on sentiment, is often encouraged by managing editors of publishers whose style sheet or house manual indicates what spellings are acceptable in its publications. Equally correct alternative spellings as identified by Deighton [11] for 2000 words in four collegiate dictionaries are given short shift. Catalogue may still be foisted on children in spelling materials and workbooks, in readers and phonic programs, because editors believe that they are the final arbiters to keep the language "pure" and, if a choice is available, will apparently choose the more complex, the more unphonetic, the more irregular spelling.

The following is a sample of alternate spellings, both of which are correct:

antennas - antennae
aunty - auntie
buses - busses (for transportation)
practise - practice
busing - bussing (for transportation, not kissing)
blond - blonde
bluish - blueish
brocoli - broccoli
brunet - brunette
calory - calorie
cigaret - cigarette
curst - cursed
drafty - draughty
past - passed
gasolene - gasoline
gelatin - gelatine
glamor - glamour
defense - defence
instal - install
license - licence
liquify - liquefy
beefs- beeves
bran-new - brand-new
cagy - cagey
develop - develope
drout - drought
pinocl - pinochle

While it is commonly reported that there is only one correct spelling for every word in the language, the above list is representative of some 2400 words having alternatively correct spellings as found in various collegiate dictionaries. Although the belief that there is only one correct spelling has been supported by teachers in the spellings they accept, by the uniform usage to be observed in newspapers and magazines, resistance to such arbitrary behavior has also been noted. One publisher in its books has dropped the apostrophe in such words as dont, wont, cant; another allows its authors the freedom to spell aids as aides when referred to in instructional materials; another avoids teaching the so called "es rule after words ending in o" to indicate the plural spelling of tomatos, zeros, potatos, tobaccos, nos, mottos; newspapers generally use buses rather than busses, etc.

Oddly enough, teachers when informed that each spelling in a list similar to that above was correct [12] and asked what they would do as a result of this knowledge, were first surprised, indicated little knowledge of the availability of alternatives, and that they would modify their teaching behavior to include teaching "bright" children that there are equivalent spellings but would hold lesser able children to one spelling. When asked which spelling that would be, the uniform response was that which was shown in workbooks or spelling texts. The assumption that when the more phonetic, the more regularly spelled words found their way into lists or into spelling materials, then teachers would teach these spellings suggests one way to move spelling reform forward.

A replication of this study using parents, teachers and seventh and eighth grade children in one suburban community [8] indicated that only 4% of the population were aware of some of these alternatives, that responding to the questionnaire was a learning experience since most examined their dictionaries after completing the questionnaire and that parents often excused their spelling knowledge by pointing out that "I went to school some 20 or 30 years ago and spelling has changed."

The expectancy of change suggests a predisposition to accept change and reinforces the findings of Stern's study that spelling reform would be supported.

Direction for Change

It would certainly be incorrect for me to state "this is the way it should be" since no one individual's prejudices should dictate the direction for change. Rather we can rely on research and the documented views of many reformers in history to establish a commonality for direction. Rather than a reform of the orthography — if such it can be called since "unphonetic, irregular and illogical as it is, modern English spelling does not merit the name *orthography*, which is made up of two Greek words meaning 'correct writing'." [13] — it is my belief that a reform in orthography should be our aim.

If those words which do not consistently follow the consonant and vowel rules as established for reading instruction (Mazurkiewicz, 1976) were made to conform, learning to read and write would be vastly easier since no exceptions would exist and only 25 to 30 rules would be needed and readily mastered. We should move in the direction of an elimination of unnecessary silent letters and might start with those which were inserted based on false etymology (the *b* in *dumb* and *doubt*, for example),but not those which are morphophonemic (the *b* in *bomb, bombard*, the *g* in *sign-signal*); the elimination of the diacritic silent *e* (Mazurkiewicz, 1974) following *v, z*, etc. where the signal today is meaningless or redundant, the reduction of the number of alternative graphemes to represent the sounds of English, the addition of the diacritic e following vowels to provide digraphic representations; etc.

Since research has demonstrated that a moderate reform would be most acceptable at this time [7] by the largest number of people, if we care that children should not be subject to the risk of

failure and unnecessary frustration in learning to read, should not risk ego damage and being turned off from the adventure of education, we can start moderately by shifting to the use of alternative and equally correct spelled words which use the past tense morpheme t in such words as curst, spelt, etc., to those which are more phonemic, less complex, etc.

We should encourage more business and industries to utilize additional phonetic spellings and expect that television and other advertizing media will establish these as the accepted spellings since nearly all of a sample of 500 adults **[14]** indicated that many of the words they now write have been learned from these sources.

Whatever the rationale we choose to adopt, there is little doubt that support for a reform exists, that we can effectively use modern means of exploitation and that a reform is possible if we take the initiative to move one to the fore.

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Spelling and Parliament,

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A paper presented at the First International Conference of the Simplified Spelling Society, at College of All Saints, London.

In Britain we are a parliamentary democracy. We vote at stated intervals to elect a House of Commons of 635 members. From these, the leader of the largest political party is called upon by the Sovereign to choose a Cabinet and form a Government. This Government is the Executive and is the body which has the power and the authority to make all decisions concerning the welfare of the nation.

It is widely believed by many of those who are well qualified to judge that our spelling conventions are at present unsatisfactory and that they should be improved. There is no authority which can improve them except the authority of Parliament. No individual or group of individuals can make any effective changes except through Parliament.

Our present spelling is thought by some to be 'traditional' and will hereinafter be designated 'traditional orthography' or T.O.

It may be objected to what was said in the second paragraph that T.O. itself was not brought about by any Act of Parliament and the objection is reasonable. What we call T.O. was brought about by printers and, to a lesser extent, by writers during the latter part of the 17th century. It was unsatisfactory even then, though not as unsatisfactory then as it has become since. It has become more unsatisfactory because, during the intervening three centuries, it has changed very little, while the language which it is supposed to represent has changed very much. This unsatisfactory spelling has continued to be accepted by the nation because of important reasons, including the following:

(1) Many millions of copies of the Authorised Version of the Bible have been printed and read in something like our present T.O.
(2) Shakespeare's plays also have been printed and read, not in Shakespeare's spelling but in T.O.
(3) This spelling, with its disadvantages and imperfections, was accorded the imprimature of the formidable Samuel Johnson when he published his Dictionary in 1755 and when he wrote in his preface: *"I have attempted few alterations, and among those few, perhaps the greatest part is from modern to ancient practice."* He recommended that people *"should not disturb upon narrow views or for minute propriety the orthography of their fathers."* By this he probably meant that they should not attempt to change 17th century spelling to match the great changes that had taken place in the language. So 17th century spelling was fastened even more securely on our language.

A second objection might be that thoroughgoing spelling and alphabet reform were introduced in Turkey, 1928, by the efforts of one man, namely Kemel Ataturk; but the circumstances were quite different because Turkey at that time was not a parliamentary democracy such as we are now. A third possible objection is that important changes were made in American spelling by Noah

Webster; but his Elementary Spelling Book of 1783 is said to have sold more than 100 million copies and to have had the approval of no less a person than Benjamin Franklin. Webster's American Dictionary of the English Language, 1828, was quickly accepted as the standard for spelling and subsequent editions maintained this authority. It is difficult to see how that sort of change could be brought about in contemporary Britain by any one man or by any small group of men, however eminent.

When compulsory schooling was introduced by Parliament a century ago, the principal concern of the authority might well have been to give children a good education in their native language and literature: more consistent spelling might have been agreed on and introduced. The attention of the authorities was, however, distracted by other considerations which seemed at that time to be even more urgent. Social and industrial changes were affecting villages and, even more, towns. Families with children were uprooted. Many authorities found that their foremost task was not to provide children with a good education but to get them off the streets. As the historian, G. M. Young, wrote: *"In 1870 the essential was to get the children somehow into some sort of school . . . In Birmingham, forty out of every hundred children were running loose in the streets, while in Manchester the figure was as high as 50 out of every hundred."* **[1]** Chambers' Encyclopaedia, Vol. 4, page 800, 1973, states that in the eighteen sixties, 2 million children **[1]** were not attending school: that would have been about 40%. Well might Young say that the essential was to get the children, somehow, into some sort of school.

Children had to be accommodated somewhere while their fathers, and often their mothers too, were hard at work, and they had to be kept occupied for otherwise they would tend to become listless, mischievous and perhaps destructive. 'Education' was a wonderful ideal but the authorities seemed to be chiefly interested in making compulsory the three R's (reading, writing and arithmetic) and thus in making children spend their time and energy struggling with out-of-date and unsuitable spelling units, and with out-of-date and unreasonable units of measurement.

The passing of the R.E. Forster Act of 1870 did not mark a sudden break with the past (at the time, my own school log book did not mention it). Lowe's Revised Code of 1862 had required that all children should be instructed in reading, writing and arithmetic according to a clearly defined syllabus issued by a central authority and that all girls should be instructed in plain needlework. School experiments with reformed alphabet shapes or with reform spelling were not expressly forbidden and it is possible that some bold teachers did try such experiments. We know that Isaac Pitman's Phonotypy had been tried in schools 30 years earlier, in 1832; and there was the testimony of the great Alexander Ellis who wrote regarding *"the importance of employing a phonetic alphabet as a desirable, nay, necessary instrument in national education in that it furnished the only means by which reading, spelling and writing could become general among the great body of English people."* **[2]**

For hundreds of years, and certainly since the latter part of the 16th century, it had been realised by many of those who had most carefully studied the matter that what we call T.O. is subject to serious objections whether considered from the standpoint of etymology, phonology or, most important of all, teaching. It is the teaching aspects of the matter which has led Parliament, as representing the nation, to consider what reforms are needed and how much reforms might be implemented.

The Simplified Spelling Society had been founded in 1908 by a group of scholars under the chairmanship of Professor Walter Skeat. Some few years later, during the time when Professor Gilbert Murray was president, when Sir George Hunter was Chairman, when William Archer was Secretary and Walter Ripman was Treasurer, a Petition to the Prime Minister was organized by the Society with the aim of directing Parliament's attention to the evidence relating to the need for

spelling reform. Responsibility for the Petition and for much of the actual work involved in interviewing people who were prominent in administration and in scholarship were accepted by Sir George himself and by his personal secretary, Mr. Thomas B. Barber. Mr. Barber was Secretary also of the Simplified Spelling Society and remained Secretary for many years afterwards and until his retirement in 1954.

By July, 1923, there was an impressive list of signatures in support of the Petition. There were names of 15,000 people who were representatives of scholars, writers, administrators and men and women who were prominent in public life and affairs. The list represented, probably, hundreds of thousands of such people inasmuch as, in many cases, the president and secretary signed on behalf of all the members of a society following a resolution passed at a general meeting. The covering letter was signed by forty people *'whose eminence in Scholarship, Science, Letters and Affairs is widely recognised'* as Sir George Hunter commented.

During the next few years, and until shortly before 1933, the teaching staffs and the administrative staffs of universities were generally in favour of asking the government to appoint a representative committee of eminent scholars who should be asked to consider the case for spelling reforms and the means by which such reforms might most conveniently be carried out. 800 of these eminent scholars signed the Petition. **[3]** It must be remembered in this connexion that the number of universities, and consequently of university staffs, was then smaller than it is now after the great expansion of recent times. So 800 really is a notable figure.

In the Univ. of Birmingham, signatures included those of Sir Charles Grant Robertson, the Vice-Chancellor, C. W. Valentine, the Prof. of Education and of 20 other professors, 19 Lecturers and 4 Readers. In the Univ. of Cambridge, those who signed included Dr. P. Giles, the Master of Emmanuel College, Sir J. J. Thomson, the Master of Trinity College, Dr A. C. Seward, the Master of Downing College, Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, the Prof. of English Literature, Dr. Emery Barnes, the Prof. of Divinity, Dr G. G. Coulton, the famous historian of the middle ages, together with 37 other Professors and Lecturers.

In the Univ. of Oxford, those who signed included W. D. Ross, the Provost of Oriel College, C. H. Sampson, the Principal of Brasenose College, Dr. A. H. Sayce, who was later Prof. of Assyriology, Sir M. E. Sadler, the Master of University College; Prof. Gilbert Murray, who was Regius Prof. of Greek and who succeeded Walter Skeat as President of the Simplified Spelling Society in 1912 and who supervised its policies until his death in 1957; Dr. R. R. Marrett, Rector of Exeter College, Dr. Reg. W. Macan, late Master of University College and an authoritative advocate of spelling reform; Prof. H. C. Wyld, Merton Prof. of English Language and Literature and Editor of the Universal Dictionary of the English Language; F. M. Powicke, Regius Prof. of Modern History; Percy Simpson, Fellow of Oriel College, an authority with A. W. Pollard, W. W. Greg, E. Maunde Thompson, J. Dover Wilson and R. W. Chambers (O.U.P. 1923) on Shakespeare's spelling in the Sir Thomas More play (fragment) and in Venus & Adonis and Lucrece, which are the only examples we have of how Shakespeare himself actually spelt words: Edmund Blunden, former Prof. of English Literature in the Imperial Univ. of Tokyo, Dr. M. W. Keatinge, Reader in Education and D. H. MacGregor, Prof. of Political Economy: along with 24 other eminent scholars.

In the Univ. of London, there were: Lascelles Abercrombie, the Prof. of English Literature (David Abercrombie, his son, was for some years Chairman of the Simplified Spelling Society, during the time when I was Honorary Secretary); A. Lloyd James, who was later Prof. of Phonetics (he did much of the work involved in producing the fifth edition of New Spelling 1940, and wrote the Preface which appears on pages 5 to 7); Sir T. Percy Nunn, Director of the Institute of Education, Sir Cyril Burt, F.B.A., Prof. of Philosophy, together with 40 other distinguished scholars.

In the Univ. of Manchester, those who signed included the Professors of English Language, English Literature, and almost all of the other departments of the University.

There were many signatures from the Universities of Aberdeen, Bristol, Durham, Edinburgh (58 names), Glasgow (41 names), Liverpool (Vice-Chancellor, 25 Professors and 12 others), Reading (Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, 11 Professors and 20 Lecturers), St Andrew's (Vice-Chancellor and 38 others), Sheffield (Sir Henry Hadow, formerly Vice-Chancellor and 16 others), Univ. of Wales (the Principal, 16 Professors and 28 Lecturers), from Univ. of Nottingham there were 16 names.

There were also the names of 125 Members of Parliament, 22 Bishops, including William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury, 49 publishers, including Edward Arnold, Jonathan Cape, W. & R. Chambers, 8 authors, including H. G. Wells, J. B. Priestley, Julian Huxley and Sir Norman Angell. There was support also from many educational associations, including the National Union of Teachers, National Association of Schoolmasters, the Association of Teachers in Technical Institutes, and the Educational Institute of Scotland.

Thus supported and encouraged by the widespread approval of the universities' teaching and administrative staffs, by teachers, writers and publishers, Sir George Hunter in July, 1923 met some of the Simplified Spelling Society's committee and interviewed Sir Charles Trevelyan, who was then President of the Board of Education. He stated the Board's official position thus: *"While difficulties of the present system (of spelling) were admitted, he felt that the appointment of the Commission or Committee could not be expected to result in any scientific solution unless the supporters of Spelling Reform were able as a preliminary to decide upon an agreed and definite scheme."* Lord Irwin later (in 1933) quoted and agreed with this point of view.

Rebuffed by the Board of Education because he had not brought an agreed and definite scheme, Sir George Hunter asked the Society's Committee to reconsider and possibly revise the earlier proposals which had been formulated by William Archer and Walter Ripman. After renewed consideration, the proposers and supporters of English Spelling Reform met on May 3rd, 1933, and unanimously agreed to approve and submit for the proposed Committee's consideration the scheme (New Spelling) approved by the Simplified Spelling Society. Sir George Hunter's covering letter included the following sentence: *"The scheme has been used in a number of elementary schools with benefit to the children; it does not require any new letters or any additions to the printers' fonts of type . . . It is not expected that our spelling can be immediately changed by any arbitrary decree but it is believed that any improvements recommended by the Committee will be voluntarily and gradually adopted."* This meeting, on 3rd May, was attended by Sir George Hunter, Chairman, and by: Mr. A. Lloyd James, Reader in Phonetics at London Univ., Mr. Walter Ripman, Chief Inspector of Schools for London Univ., Prof. W. Emery Barnes, Prof. Daniel Jones, Sir E. Dennison Ross, Mr. A. E. Henshall, ex-President of the National Union of Teachers, Wm. Barkley, Journalist, Oswald Lewis, M.P., W. G. Pearson, M.P., Mr. Gray Jones, representing the Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters, Mr. Gordon and Mr. T. R. Barber, Secretary of the Simplified Spelling Society.

Even after this, Lord Irwin wrote on June 30, 1933, saying that the Government could not agree to the appointment by the Government of a Committee *"... because its official character would give people the impression that legislation might be possible in the future. There is no justification for the board to go even this far..."* Lord Irwin declined to appoint a committee and declined to receive a deputation. The scholarship that had produced several versions of New Spelling and all the work that had resulted in the collection of 15,000 signatures of prominent people were rendered of no avail because of what must have seemed to Sir George very much like obstinacy on the part of Lord Irwin and his advisers. Sir George was defeated. He died in 1937 and left a large legacy to

enable the Society to continue the work for spelling reform which had meant so much to him. Here again, he suffered another defeat. All moneys used for educational purposes are 'charitable' and therefore exempt from paying income tax. The amazing truth is that the Society's income from the Hunter bequest was declared to be not for educational purposes. The money was, therefore, subject to income tax and the Society has lost many thousands of pounds because of this decision.

On 11th March, 1949, Dr. Mont Follick, M.P. for Loughborough, presented his Private Member's Spelling Reform Bill to the House of Commons. Part 1 of the Bill asked for the establishment of a committee to produce a scheme for the simplified and consistent spelling of English. Part 2 required that reformed spelling should be used first in schools, later in government publications and later still should be used generally. The Minister of Education and that time was Rt. Hon. George Tomlinson and he was deeply concerned about the welfare of children. He cautiously expressed the opinion, however, that advocates of reform should secure some reasonable measure of public support and that later there should be an official inquiry into spelling.

On the Second Reading, 11th March, 1949, the Bill was debated for five hours and lost by only three votes, the official figures being 84:87. This was a remarkable achievement by Mont Follick and for spelling reformers. Clearly, even better things were within reach. **[4]**

In the autumn of 1952, Mont Follick was again successful in the ballot for Private Members' Bills, being drawn No. 5. He again brought in a Bill concerned with spelling reform. It required the Government to institute research into methods of improving the low standard of reading and to investigate, among other things, the use of consistent spelling, even though there might later be a transition to Queen Anne's spelling (T.O.). On Second Reading, 27.2.53, the Bill was carried by 65 votes to 53 after a debate which is reported in 82 columns of Hansard (2425–2507). Mr Ralph Morley, M.P. for Itchen, had said: *"As a class teacher for nearly fifty years, I know it is our ridiculous and illogical spelling which is the chief handicap in teaching children to read."* I myself have had more than fifty years experience of teaching and agree with what Mr. Morley said. **[5]**

After Second Reading, the Bill went to Committee where it was again approved in spite of government opposition.

On 7th May, Dr. Follick rose in the House *"To ask the Minister of Education if she will state her policy towards proposals by a competent research organisation to investigate possible improvements in the teaching of reading by means of a system of simplified spelling."* Miss Florence Horsbrugh replied: *"Any such organisation could rely on my interest and goodwill for their proposals designed to investigate possible improvements in this field of education. There would be no extra grant and the organization concerned would have to secure the willing cooperation of the l.e.a., teachers and parents."*

The sponsors of the Bill realised that it might still meet powerful opposition and that it might be rejected in the Lords. They agreed to withdraw the Bill, being well pleased with the Minister's assurance that there would be approval for properly controlled research into how the use of simplified spelling would affect the processes of learning to read.

John Downing was appointed to administer the tests to the i.t.a. groups, also to the control groups. The i.t.a. experiments were started in September 1961. After only a few weeks it was clear that children could learn to read in the fairly consistent i.t.a. much more quickly and much better than the control groups could learn to read T.O. It seemed also that reading skill acquired with consistent i.t.a. could be transferred later to reading matter printed in T.O. Subsequent tests confirmed this. The most important result of the i.t.a. research was to prove that T.O. *is* a handicap to children when they are learning to read. What happened after the transition was interesting but it

did not affect the really important conclusion quoted in the last sentence. These experiments, and later ones, were a consequence of the Follick-Pitman success in the House of Commons, 27 February, 1953, and the Minister's subsequent assurance that there would be approval of, though no government grant for, experiments with simplified spelling in the teaching of reading.

It seems that Mont Follick was more concerned with spelling reform then he was with teaching children to read T.O. It was only with reluctance that he agreed to the withdrawal of his 1953 Bill and he later seems to have regretted having done so. He was a true spelling reformer and remained so until his death, 10.12.1958. His Will required that his fortune should be used to found and endow a professor's chair of Comparative Philology *"in which spelling reform (not merely the teaching of reading) should form a principal part."* Dr. Mont Follick had been the founder and was the Proprietor of the Regent School of Languages. His estate was large. After considerable delay, the money was accepted by the Univ. of Manchester and William Haas was appointed the first Mont Follick Professor. This decision was the crucial decision which must decide to what extent the benefactor's aims are likely to be fulfilled. All this may reasonably and fairly be said to follow from the House of Commons' verdict on 27th February, 1953.

During recent years, two Departmental Committees have considered language teaching and, especially, the teaching of reading. Lady Plowden was Chairman of the first. Detailed evidence was submitted by the Simplified Spelling Society but this did not appear in the report, although the name and school of the Honorary Secretary did appear. During 1970 and 1971, useful correspondence passed between the Society and the Departmental Inspector for English, Mr. E. Wilkinson. I met Mr. Wilkinson on 15 November, 1971, and we discussed the Society's Resolution to the Minister. We did not disagree on any of the items included in this Resolution, and we discussed what further progress might be made, such as experiments with *New Spelling* under the auspices of a university. The unexpected and unexplained departures of our President and Chairman from the Annual General Meeting made it difficult for the Society to make further progress at the time with the Departmental Inspector. The final sentence of the Resolution was: *"Members of this Society . . . urge the government to institute an inquiry into the educational, financial and international advantages likely to result from modernizing our out-of-date spelling conventions."*

Another Government Committee was appointed in 1971. There were 19 members and Sir Alan Bullock was appointed Chairman. During 1972 and '73, several of us wrote on behalf of the Simplified Spelling Society and expressed regret because the Society had not been invited to give oral and written evidence. Mr. S. S. Eustace was at that time Hon. Sec. of the Society and wrote several times. Mr. R. Arnold was Sec. of the Bullock Com. and early in 1971, he wrote saying that the Society's representatives would be able to give oral evidence to the Bullock Com. We were invited also to send an agreed 'submission.' Of the dates offered, the first one, Jan. 23rd, was chosen by the Society's Committee at its meeting on Jan. 12th. There was not adequate time in which to prepare an agreed 'submission' but four of us (Messrs. Eustace, Gibbs, O'Halloran and Reed) met in Elizabeth House on Jan. 23rd. We met a Bullock Committee (not the full Committee) under the chairmanship of Prof. J. E. Merritt. Prof. Merritt is, incidentally, a member of the Simplified Spelling Society.

That meeting with the members of the official Bullock Committee was important and promising. Mr. O'Halloran, who has since been elected Honorary Secretary of the Simplified Spelling Society, made a particularly good impression on the Bullock Committee and has since had important correspondence and interviews with some of its members. Progress towards improvement in our spelling conventions will have to be the result of recommendations by a Departmental Committee appointed by, and reporting back to, Parliament.

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[1] G. M. Young, The Victorian Age, Penguin, p. 116.
[2] Benn Pitman, Life and Labours of Isaac Pitman, 1902, quoted by Harrison in, Instant Reading, Pitman, 1964, pp. 30–34.
[3] The Case for the Improvement of Spelling, Simplified Spelling Society Pamphlet, 1933, pp16–32
[4] Hansard, 11 March, 1949.
[5] Hansard, 27 February, 1953.

S I M P L I F I E D S P E L L I N G S O C I E T Y

Founded in 1908 by Professor W.W. Skeat, Lit.D., LL.D., D.C.L., Ph.D.

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TEXT OF RESOLUTION

to The Secretary of State,
Department of Education and Science

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"Whereas many great authorities on English have deplored the inconsistency of its spelling and have advocated reform;

And whereas no reasonable case against spelling reform has ever been made by any considerable scholar;

And whereas experiments in Britain, America and elsewhere have proved our spelling to be wasteful of time and effort;

And whereas a number of other nations have in recent times reformed their spelling conventions with great benefit to themselves and to other users of their languages;

And whereas English is now being learnt as a second language by a large proportion of the human race and is the most widely used international language;

Members of this Society, feeling that it is now incumbent upon native speakers of English to remove unnecessary difficulties in the learning and use of the language, whether by students approaching it has a second language or by English-speaking and other children learning to read it and write it, urged the Government to institute an inquiry into the educational, financial and international advantages likely to result from modernizing our out-of-date spelling conventions."

Passed by subsequent Gen. Meeting, Dec. 12, 1970.

William Reed, Hon. Secretary.

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[Spelling Reform ed Newell Tune a15.5 pp216–220 in the printed version]
[Spelling Progress Bulletin Fall 1977 pp15–19 in the printed version]

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL,

by Edward Rondthaler

TINKERING with English spelling — simplifying it to make it easier — has been a scholarly pastime for centuries: a sort of parlor game not taken too seriously by anybody because even the stupidity of our traditional spelling is no more absurd than expecting the hundreds of millions who now read and write English to go back to school and learn how to spell all over again — or hoping that children with a brief exposure to phonetics will some day rise up en masse and demand spelling reform.

Such hopes, such utopian dreams do not square with the facts. Our human nature is not easily changed — even for so worthy a cause as better spelling. The big writing reform in Turkey fifty years ago did not spring from public demand. It came as a dictatorial decree rammed down the throats of millions. Where, in an English speaking democracy, will you find a leader powerful enough to issue such an unpopular edict, and make it stick?

Dr. Godfrey Dewey calls our erratic spelling the Roadblock to Reading. Let's put it more bluntly: the real roadblock to reading is the impossibility of persuading millions to change their writing habits. Were it not for this we'd have had spelling reform long long ago.

No amount of wishful thinking will push this roadblock aside, but thanks to recent typographical developments we can detour around it and simplify our reading matter before we change our writing habits!

Impossible? Consider this:

Traditional typesetting methods are undergoing their greatest change in 500 years. It is a revolution of giant proportions, shaking the printing industry from top to bottom. Typesetting is now turning itself inside out as it changes from a 3-dimensional mechanical process to a 2-dimensional photo-computerized process. Most of the printed matter you read today is a product of this revolution. No layman casually looking at the printed page can see any difference; but what goes on behind the scene is quite another matter.

Today's newly trained typesetter taps out words on a computer-compatible keyboard connected by punched or magnetic tape to a computerized photo-typesetting machine. As the computer receives words from the tape it digests them, relates them to pre-coded technical instructions, and sends amended signals to the photo-composing mechanism telling it what words to set and precisely how to set them. If, for example, the operator taps out the letters a-n-y, the computer will signal the composing machine to set a-n-y in a specific type style, size, width and spacing. It will also precalculate the justification, quadding, centering or indentation, and when a full word fails to fit on the end of a line it checks back into memory and finds out where the word should be divided! This sleight of hand takes place at astronomical speeds.

Now comes the key that unlocks the door to spelling reform. If the machine's computer were a little larger it could do even more. It could receive words in traditional spelling, simplify the spelling automatically, and pass them along for typesetting in the new simplified form! There is nothing particularly novel about this concept except its application: for years computers have been unscrambling secret coded messages of far greater complexity. What is new is that the typesetting revolution makes it possible for computers to take over the hitherto impossible job of simplifying the spelling of printed English — to do it as a routine — automatically, consistently and uncomplainingly. Every time a keyboard operator taps out the letters a-n-y the computer will send out the signal e-n-y — or even e-n-i, depending on the system of simplification finally agreed upon.

And so, without any change in our writing habits, without any re-schooling of authors, editor, copywriters, reporters, or typesetters, we are on the threshold of being able to simplify the spelling of printed English with an instant flip of the switch. If spelling reform is ever achieved, automatic transliteration will spearhead the change. Indeed from this day forward we should look to the computers of the typesetting industry to solve a problem for humanity that will never be solved otherwise.

Computerized transliteration lends itself equally well to an instant change, or to a gradual "step-by-step" shift as currently proposed by Harry Lindgren of Australia. With automatic transliteration leading the way, the "50 steps of change" that Mr. Lindgren suggests could probably be covered in far less time than the fifty years he foresees. Fifty steps in 50 or 100 months might be a better estimate. If after taking a few of these steps we found it advisable to go no further we could end reform at that point and be considerably better off than we were before. Which, incidentally, is one of the reasons why spelling reform is less of an all-or-nothing commitment than the change to Metric.

But what about personal or business letters and handwritten notes that never get into print? What about Aunt Sophia, and Grandmother, and Uncle Amos? What about all the retraining? Lose no sleep over such matters. When computers lead the way the rest of us can follow at our own pace — if we want to. Many of us will pick up the new spelling from the printed page. If it makes sense we'll adopt it, as fast or as slowly as we wish. Others will continue to write traditionally. No matter. We need no drive for converts. No one should ever be urged to update his spelling. Those who from childhood have spelled traditionally will always be able to read both ways and to write traditionally — until our quaint orthography dies a natural death. That's how it's been in Holland, Germany, Norway, Denmark, Russia, France, Turkey, Korea and other countries where improvements in spelling have taken place.

So much for spelling and writing. How about reading? Readers cannot be computerized.

Here we come face-to-face with long established habits, and we may meet big resistance. We won't know how much until we try, but since we can end the reform steps at any point we have nothing to lose by making a start. To minimize reading resistance we must do everything possible to make reformed reading easy. The changeover must be so gradual, so inconspicuous, so natural, so logical and sensible, so comfortable for the reader, and introduced so subtly that he is hardly aware of being wooed away from his childhood spelling. And this is precisely where computers rise to the occasion. They can slowly but surely feed new spellings into the mainstream of printed matter, feeding them in so gently that the man-in-the-street should have little reason to be upset. He should be given every chance to adjust comfortably. Month by month we will monitor

public acceptance through a series of opinion polls, enabling us to introduce each new step from coast to coast or worldwide with the very best of timing.

There is, of course, a good chance that acceptance will come much faster than we anticipate. Graphic change is now quite commonplace. You can test this for yourself by comparing typical posters, magazines and advertising today with a similar sampling from a decade or two ago. You'll be impressed at how quickly we've adjusted to new visual presentations without even knowing it. Or look back at the late '20s when printers introduced a rash of typefaces with newly designed g's and a's based on a single circle. The new shapes of these two upright lowercase letters changed about 40% of our "word-pictures" as traditionally printed and read by successive generations. Yet the change brought no whimper of public protest. It is worth noting that typesetters of the '20s willingly accepted the newly shaped letters because, as far as they were concerned, the shift was purely mechanical — as it will be with computerized transliteration. These examples of graphic change are not as formidable as those of spelling reform. Nevertheless the public may take it in stride and surprise us.

But before any of this can come to pass the ball must be started rolling. That will take a big push from a big giant. Who is the most likely giant?

We're told that reading and writing failure is the chief cause of school dropout. We're told that youthful dropouts are, to a large extent, the fuel of our anti-social problems: juvenile delinquency, crime-in-the-streets, hard core unemployment, poverty and, to some extent, drug abuse. Yet nobody with a big voice is saying that we should attack these titanic social evils by reforming our haphazard, frustrating spelling — the major cause of dropout. Why not? Why aren't our social agencies, our police, our prisons, reform schools, "Head Start" programs, BOCES, our welfare workers, and our schools — why aren't they out in front fighting for simplification? A good guess is that up to now they've regarded the task as far too formidable. And up to now they were probably right.

But no longer. Our Federal and State social agencies could easily take the lead. Their problems are enormous, their work load is growing heavier every day, and in the long run they stand to gain a great deal from reform. Commenting on the fact that over half of the country's prisoners cannot write, Chief Justice Berger of the Supreme Court says! "The percentage of inmates in all institutions who cannot read or write is staggering . . . figures on literacy alone are enough to make one wish that every sentence imposed could include a provision that would grant release when the prisoner had learned to read and write."

When our social agencies begin to see how transliterating computers can be used to spearhead spelling change — so "we the people" can just fall in behind — they may speak up for reform. Their voice is big. It is big enough to get the job done. Their giant push could start the ball rolling.

Another big push might come from those engaged in areas where English has become a "second language": foreign trade and commerce, international communication, and negotiations between nations. A simpler spelling of English has much to offer here.

And finally we have the parents of our school children, 25% of whom are two to six years behind grade in reading and writing; the mothers and fathers of 700,000 dropouts each year, and the friends of 20,000,000 functionally illiterate U.S. adults.

While we're wooing concerned parents, social agencies, international business men, the U.N. diplomats and others, we should not overlook the importance of winning the printing industry to our side. Printers — particularly graphic designers, type directors, and typographers — have spent their lives studying the legibility, and artistry, the graphics and mechanics of the printed page. They, better than anyone else, know what makes a page easy to read, what interferes with reading, what gives a page warmth, what makes it cold. They are experienced at cushioning the impact of change and know quite a bit, in a very practical way about reader psychology. If they cannot be won to reform, reform is not likely to be won without them.

What then, will the first transliterating computer be able to do, and when will it be doing it?

An experimental transliterating computer is now programmed with the 44,000 most-used words in written contemporary English. This collection of words comes largely from a study completed in 1961 by Dr. W. N. Francis of Brown University's Department of Linguistics. It covers a million-word sampling of running text selected from a wide variety of subjects: news, editorials, the arts, hobbies, skills, religion, science, biography, memoirs, general fiction, science fiction, humor, romance, mysteries, mathematics, humanities, natural sciences, annual reports, government documents, etc. Proper names and unusual technical terms have, for the present, been deleted from this list, but for each deletion a word has been added from the Merriam-Webster list of 35,000 most-used words or from the McGraw-Hill list of 20,000. The total is substantially a composite of all three lists. These 44,000 words have been transliterated into Soundspel, placed on magnetic tape (with traditional and simplified spellings in parallel) and programmed so that traditionally spelled input tape will generate a matching output tape in simplified spelling. The output tape is compatible with photo-typesetting machines. Complete typeset pages may now be produced without individual transliterating or manual re-keyboarding.

The Soundspel phonetic system used for the transliterating program is a merger of Ripman-Archer *"New Spelling,"* Godfrey Dewey's *"World English Spelling,"* and certain modifications suggested by the Typographic Council for Spelling Reform. The pronunciation standard is the broadcasting industries *"NBC Handbook of Pronunciation,"* the *"Random House Dictionary of the English Language."* or *"Webster's New International Dictionary,"* whichever sanctions the least deviation from traditional spelling.

As soon as the first series of tests is completed the Council will, if the need arises, make its program available for experimentation with other systems of English orthography. Such systems need not be limited to the conventional Roman alphabet since the program and typesetting facilities have enough flexibility to accommodate unique letters.

The project's computer facility is located at Ocean County College in Toms River, New Jersey. The phototypesetting and design facility is the combined equipment and resources of Photo-Lettering Inc. and the International Typeface Corporation in New York. Ed Lias is in charge of the former, Edward Rondthaler of the latter. The Council enjoys the confidence and support of the institutions just mentioned, it seeks to broaden its contacts with all who see the need for spelling reform or can in any way be influential in stimulating progress toward that end, and it hopes that the project will serve as the typographic industry's contribution to wider use of written English for the enlightenment and benefit of mankind.

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See diagrams below: